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ABSTRACT

The conflict surrounding the administrator's attitude toward change arises from the paradoxical positions that change is inherently good and necessary to avoid stagnation and, at the same time, the individual resists it unless he perceives a gain from the change. The propositions are equally true and can be reconciled, or at least understood, and thus handled more effectively than, in the recent past, through an analysis of why administrators resist change. There is an examination of the fundamental factors from which resistance stems, including the basic needs and the sources of motivation, the role of perception, the role of communication, the role of participation, and the powerful influences of culture. Finally, there is a discussion of positive administrative attitudes toward change and some suggestions for achieving a moving equilibrium. (Author/JMF)

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The paper that follows represents a development of a talk delivered by Dr. Holm/at the 1972 Annual Meeting of the Central Association of College and University Business Officers, The Sixtieth Annual Meeting of the Association was held on May 7-9 at the LaSalle Hotel in Chicago.

Several weeks ago I was reading an editorial in the March, 1972 issue of Change:

It has become common folklore that of all our social institutions most resistant to change, cemeteries and colleges must surely rank at the top. One critic of academic ways recently summarized the matter by declaring that the universities and colleges failed to effectively deal with the future because they had none,

Then, a week or two after that, I read a brief review of a book, The Bankruptcy of Academic Policy, by Caws, Ripley, and Ritterbush, in which Caws, Professor of Philosophy at Hunter College, makes many suggestions for university restructuring. Included are the following:

If any high school graduate on entry proves to be deficient in any auxiliary subject (English, Mathematics, etc.) provide remedial training but lodge a protest with the school in question, preferably a personal one...

Abolish all administrative posts above the department level except those of president, registrar, and treasurer. Spend the money thus saved on providing the most comfortable environment possible for learning—the other paperwork of the university can be done by purely clerical officers, and should any major administrative problem arise that the president gannot handle himself it can be taken care of by a committee of the faculty.../.

Let the faculty do what it does best: If a man is good at something, let/him offer a course in it; if no students, enroll for such a course, let him offer one in the thing he is next best at. If he does not do anything well (and knowing something well is not in itself doing /anything well) do not renew his contract.:..

/Unless I am quite wrong/there would be great difference of opinion on/both points of view. Let's try a/third point of view, making a few word changes, it an excerpt from a Peter Drucker essay, "Business Objectives and Survival Needs," and found in one of his latest books, Technology, Management, and Society. As' I read this brief quote, I would like you to substitute the phrase "educational institution" each time he uses the phrase "business enterprise" or the word "business."

Indeed, in the business enterprise we have the first institution which is designed to produce change. All human institutions since the dawn of prehistory or learlier had always been designed to prevent change—all of them: family, government, church, army. Change has always been a catastrophic threat to/human security. But in the business enterprise we have an institution that is designed to create change. This is a very novel thing. Incidentally, it is one of the basic reasons for the complexity and difficulty of the institution. This means not only that flusiness must be able to adapt to change—that would be nothing very new. It means that every business, to survive, must strive to innovate. And Innovation, that is, purposéful, organized action o bring about the new, is as important in the

PLATINGIA - VISION ATTION OF COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY BURINE OFFICERS • ONE DUPONT CHICLE • WASHING OF DIT. 20036 social field—the ways, methods, and organization of business.¹

The Conflict of Change

We have a dilemma, a paradox, a dichotomy—call it what you will—two propositions, both true, which are in conflict.

- 1) To deny the value of change is heresy. It is a sign of stagnation.
- 2). Yet most of us resist it, unless we as individuals perceive gain from the change.

I believe these propositions can be reconciled," or at least the points of conflict can be understood and thus handled more effectively than they have been in many, situations in recent years, on the battlefields of campuses and among the students, the faculties, the administration, and the many publics to which colleges and universities relate. This, I propose to do through an analysis of why we resist change, not extolling in great detail why we must change-to grow and improve. That is a truism. It is the manager's job to achieve both stability and change. We, as administrators, must aim for a dynamic stability by adjusting and readjusting to internal and external stimulae. We seek a moving equilibrium in which there is a minimum of short term maladjustment and resistance. We must adopt positive attitudes or we will be overcome by our internal and external environments. An analogy seems appropriate here, and being a "sailor" since boyhood I like very much the comments of David Ewing in his book, The Managerial Mind, regarding tension in the organization, which, of course, lies at the roots of change:

In the managerial mind, the value of tension is closely related to the value of differences, and it, in turn, makes differences more meaningful.

Tension does not signal breakdown or failure. Similarly, the opposite of tension—harmony, serenity, equilibrium—does not represent an idea. The administrator rejects the notion that tension should be avoided if at all possible. He views tranquility in an organization with alarm, associating it with sick enterprises and vulnerable departments. He finds tension not only acceptable but desirable.

Why does the manager value tension? I draw first on an analogy made not by a manager but by a minister, Duncan E. Littlefair.

A sailboat makes its way because of the opposition of its sail to the wind. If this opposition is firm enough, the sailboat makes good progress, even

¹Peter Drucker, "Business Objectives and Survival Needs," Technology, Management, and Society (New York: Harper and Row, 1970), p. 158.

against the wind. But if there is too much opposition between wind and sail, the boat may turn over, and if there is too little opposition, no headway is made....

So it is in an administration. Men and women in the organization must oppose one another if they are to gain from association. If there is too little opposition, the relationships are static. If there is too much, the organization may be swamped. The amount of opposition, contradiction, attack, and defense must be firmly but reasonably controlled.

The kind of opposition to which I refer comes from healthy skepticism, genuine differences of opinion, and pursuit of one's self-interest. It is not the kind that results from malicious design, breakdowns in communication, stupidity, and obstructions of that nature.²

Unfreezing the Present Level

Kurt Lewin, one of the earliest and better known students of group behavior, suggests that the problem of change be divided into three major parts: 1) unfreezing the present level; 2) moving to the new level; and 3) refreezing group life at the new level. Management should give careful attention to the first portion, the unfreezing process, because it is the most important part of the change process. It is most important because it is the area of greatest potential for resistance. In this connection it is worth noting that many psychologists believe that only if a person wants to alter his behavior will the change be effective and endure.

My remarks deal primarily with the problem of "unfreezing" and are especially devoted to an understanding of why we have the "freeze problem" in the first place. There are indeed a number of reasons why administrators and others in the organization wish to avoid change, or resist it when thrust upon them. We, thus, will examine first the administrative tendency to avoid change. Then, in some detail, we shall look at the fundamental factors from which resistance stems. They include our basic needs and the sources of motivation, the role of perception, the role of communication, the role of participation, and the powerful influences of culture. Finally, I should like to discuss positive administrative attitudes toward change and offer some suggestions for achieving a moving equilibrium.

Why do adminstrators have difficulty keeping the tension on the springs at the level of progress, and maintaining a moving equilibrium in organization?



²David W. Ewing, *The Managerial Mind* (Foronto: Collier-MacMillian, 1964), pp. 47-48.

^{&#}x27;Kurt Lewin, "Frontiers in Group Dynamics," Human Relations, Vol. 1 (1947), p. 34.



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This is a two-sided problem. First, we have developed ways to avoid change. Second, many do not understand why there is resistance to change, and they either avoid the problem as we shall indicate, or they simply, through edict, announce to the organization that things are going to change, and then cannot understand why "people explosions" result.

Looking briefly at the lendency to avoid change, many managers put a premium on perpetuating themselves in their jobs. To them, the way to this security is to avoid the risk of tension and disequilibrium. They put harmony first and avoid controversy. Furthermore, they prefer routine to thinking. One may protect himself by providing so many channels for new suggestions to go through before getting to him, that the idea is given up before reaching that point. Then, there are those who keep, the curtain closed to new ideas by using their crowded schedule as an excuse. To escape seeing someone who might rock the boat, one resorts to a full calendar. In a meeting, when someone proposes a new idea, the meeting is pushed along in haste under the pretense that there isn't time now to consider/that idea. Finally, there are some administrators who fear tension and change, and try to avoid the problem by arriving at quick and firm conclusions. The person who jumps to a firm position on something is often the one who cannot face a new idea.

Motivators of Resistance

Administrators seek these escape routes for essentially the same reasons that their subordinates often do not welcome new ideas or ways of doing things. What are the basic reasons for resistance to change?

When we talk about making things different we are dealing with the future. The future holds uncertainties; many of these uncertainties do not lend themselves to accurate forecasts. Change is thus fraught with unknowns which upset the equilibrium of our need structure. I am sure you have all heard of Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs, which provides a useful structure for analysis of the problem.

At the risk of too much brevity, Maslow tells us that there are five basic "motivators":

- 1) Physiological—the need for food and sustenance. In our society that need is satisfied through money, which in turn is provided by our jobs in the form of wages or salaries. New ideas and changing established ways of doing things may be seen as threatening to the job, and to purchasing power.
- 2) Safety—the need to be protected in our environment. This I would like to broaden into the concept of security. We long for security—security in the niche we now occupy. Change tugs the nerve of the status quo and puts the imagination wildly at work. Am I going to lose my job? Will they change my work? Will they change my boss? At least I am going to be under scrutiny and what will happen?
- 3) Acceptance in the group. Maslow tells us we all strive for that. A supervisor charged with the responsibility of making some unpopular changes in his Adepartment is going to think more than once about doing those things that threaten his acceptance in the group. One wants to be liked by others, and change is not usually a way of bringing about such endearment.
- 4) We all seed self-esteem, as well as the esteem of others. I do not need to go into detail for us to appreciate how changing established ways is seen as threatening to the employee—happy in and proud of his existing job. Likewise, the manager, with the respect of his staff, does not relish hard decisions which have disturbing impact on his people.
- 5) Finally, self-actualization is the process of becoming what we think we are capable of becoming. We all have job aspirations. Of course, there are those, particularly in supervision, who would see change as a way to achieve recognition and advancement. While they might welcome change, there would seem to be a much larger number of supervisors and

⁽A.11. Maslow, Motivation and Personality (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1954), Chapter 5.

non-supervisors who would concentrate on the negative and threatening possibilities stemming from change.

I do not mean to suggest that all see change as threats to these particular needs. And yet, it does not appear unreasonable to assume that too many of us, as we imagine the prospects of something different in the uncertainty of the future, dwell on all the unpleasant, unfavorable things that could happen.

Resistance and Human Perception

This leads to a further reason for resistance to change—the complexities of human perception. Keith Davis tells us:

Man's reaction to incentives is based upon his perception of the whole situation. He then evaluates what he perceives and decides to act accordingly. His decision may be intellectual or emotional. The two criteria are difficult to separate in practice, and probably most decisions involve some of both; but it is clear that emotional values are paramount in most of man's relationships—at work or away from work. It has been said that man decides what he believes is right, and then uses reason to support his decision. Managers who motivate must be careful of excessive rationality. Man is man. We must accept him as he is and motivate him in his way. We cannot easily change him to fit the motivation patterns we want him to have. (This is emotionalism on our part, is it not?)

Man perceives his experiences in an organized framework or structure. The framework is not in the physical stimulus, but in the observer; so two people may have different perceptions of the same set of facts. Each perceives the facts in terms of his problems, his interests, and his background. He tends to bypass any details which do not fit his personal needs. Concerning the concrete physical world, two persons' perceptions can be fairly close together, but in the social world two perceptions rarely agree; consequently, a manager's motivation job is especially difficult.⁵

For example, an individual can perceive high security at any level of danger, while another sees no security at a very low danger level. Two jet passengers face equal chances of disaster, but one feels highly secure and the other is very frightened. In other words, objective or "factual" security is quite independent of "psychological" security.

An interesting example is cited by Davis showing tricks perception can play. An employee wanted three days of vacation to go deer hunting. His department was so rushed it was working overtime every Saturday

and the supervisor would not grant his request. The worker had a record of tardiness, and one morning he was thirty minutes late. The angry supervisor, without giving thought, threatened the employee with three days off without pay if he was tardy again that month. You may guess who was tardy the next morning. The worker perceived the "threat" as an opportunity for his desired deer hunt. Interestingly enough, management policies were upheld and the machinist reached his goals of deer hunting.

The Communication of Change

Looking at the problem of perception from another point of view, there is something inherent in change that suggests criticism. As soon as someone suggests another way of doing something, there is implied criticism of the present method. Who likes criticism? Not only do people perceive criticism in suggestions for change, they often visualize additional work and effort in making the adjustment to the new way of doing things. Taken together, the perceptions of criticism and more work are not conducive to acceptance on the part of those involved.

Perception, as well as the whole problem of resistance to change, are related to the effectiveness of communication. I believe it was Madame Curie who said, "Nothing in life is to be feared; it is only to be understood." We, fear the unknown, as well as that which we do not understand. And if I may add a thought—a fear, with the further ingredients of resentment and resistance, deeply complicate the situation when those involved are not provided advance information on changes. Even worse is to learn that something is going to happen through the rumor mill, or have a peer say, "Haven't you heard—on Monday such and such is taking place." Whether fact or distortion, such a comment is not usually welcome.

Participatory Change-Making

Of course, more than advance information is wanted by the average member of organization. He desires the information in a form he can understand and from one he considers reliable. Moreover, he wants (though he may not say it) the opportunity to discuss the change to be certain he understands the impact on him and others to whom he relates. He would even understand the situation better if he had been involved in the process which led to the change. It is realized that certain innovations and alterations cannot go to a "New England town meeting," in the true democratic process, for airing, discussion, and decision. It's so much easier, less time-consuming, and less threatening to us, the instigators of the change, really not wanting our expertise to be challenged, to issue a memorandum of edict. It is no wonder that those affected by the change have fears and resentment.



As has been suggested, another reason for resistance is lack of participation in the plans of change. The recent clamor for greater participation by faculty and students in the planning, policy-making activities in universities and colleges certainly bears witness to this observation. Grenier, a student of management strategies for implementing change, offers three alternatives.⁶

- l) Unilateral and by management edict—a memorandum or policy statement from "above."
- 2) Shared approaches that involve lower levels of the organization in defining the problem and/or suggesting alternative solutions.
- 3) Rather complete delegation to lower levels, encouraging free-wheeling 'discussion, to arrive at solutions.

It is clear that the basic difference among the three strategies is the degree of participation by those at lower levels in the organization. Researchers, especially those identified with the behavioral school of management, tell us that the shared authority strategy offers the greatest likelihood of success, in terms of minimizing resistance to change.

Change and the American Culture

Change which is imposed by unilateral edict is likely to bring out strong resistance, even though the plan, may be soundly designed and bring benefit to those involved by all objective standards. That approach runs counter to our American culture of self-reliance, self respect, and to the tradition of academic participation. We thus see another reason for resistance to change—failure to involve those who will be affected.

I just mentioned that failure to involve runs counter to the American democratic heritage, which suggests some very deep-seated reasons why we do not often welcome change. Those reasons have their roots in our heritage, which is another word—though not quite as inclusive—for culture.

The concept of culture is important in considering resistance to change. While there are many scholarly and precise definitions of culture, we may define it for this purpose as "a mass of behavior that human beings in any society learn from their elders and pass on to the younger generation." Another definition would be "an organized group of learned responses characteristic of a particular society." As managers, we might say, "That's interesting, but so what?"

Organization cannot be isolated from its cultural environment. Our alternatives for action must be considered in the light of culture. For example, what would be the effect of a policy statement from you to members of your work team, that, as of June first, there will no longer be paid holidays and vacations, and that the practice of rest periods would terminate? These privileges do not have their origin in law; they are a result of custom and are an element of culture.

On the other hand, much of the turmoil on campuses the past few years can be attributed to cultural conflict. Many of the activists were, in their eyes, marching to verbal or physical battle under the banner of reforming outmoded, stagnant "traditions" in the educational culture. Structured programs, required courses and curricula, dormitory rules and customs, established mechanisms for faculty and university or college governance, are a few that seemed common areas for conflict. Indeed, there was resistance, for cultural changes do not take place overnight. An established way of doing things has deep roots and is not easily pushed aside. It is no wonder that resistance and conflict resulted.

The Attache Case Syndrome

There are sub-cultures as well. They are found in a single organization, in a profession, or in a particular industry. Let me share portions from a column I read one morning in *The Atlanta Constitution* as I was flying to St. Louis from Atlanta.

Dear George:

I work for a firm where all the men carry attache cases, so, wishing to fit in, I have purchased an attache case. My problem is I don't know what to carry in an attache case. Can you help me?

T.Y.

Dear T.Y.:

It's not actually necessary to carry anything in an attache case. Its function is to be tapped on when talking to a client or customer. I can show you statistical proof of my statement. You say, and tap significantly on the attache case. You will not be challenged as nobody wants to see any more statistics than they have to. Other uses for attache cases are to carry magazines and to sneak writing paper and pencils home from the office. Opened and placed on the head they make a nice rain hat. If you get an attache case with a small lock on it you may become chairman of the board.

Since that time I have devoted a good deal of research to the use of attache cases. What do people actually carry in them? While this study, of course, lacks scholarly design I have concluded, in many thousands of miles of air travel and glancing into many empty attache cases as opened by travellers within view, that they are often carried for other reasons than content. And I give benefit of the doubt that the carrier may have delivered the contents, and is on the return trip—

M. Grenier, "Pauerns of Organizational Change," Harvard Business Review, Vol. 45, (No. 3, May-June, 1967).

or that he is on his way to pick up a case full! The toting efforts of many, carrying that important case many miles, were really to conform to a cultural image.

The Confusion of Roles

On a more serious note, why do we have special management problems in hospitals or among research groups? Certainly one portion of the answer lies in conflict of professional role vis-a-vis the organizational role. For example, business practices are viewed as incompatible with the medical tradition of patient care. Business practices are considered inconsistent with advancing the professor's contribution to the development and advancement of knowledge. More specifically, why should cost or organizational procedures be important when life and death is involved, or when a great breakthrough in new knowledge is at stake?

Status as a Resistor

The computer has become a part of the American culture. On several fronts, including education, it has become an important tool. At the same time it has become a status symbol, and to the academic researcher and administrator one is a nobody unless his institution has the most sophisticated hardware and software, with highly competent personnel. Many of us, in cost sensitive roles, have viewed with alarm the expenditures ballooning in geometric proportions. As many of you have no doubt experienced, attempts to consolidate and stem the tide of added expenditure meet with very strong resistance. Professional status, rooted in culture, is being threatened.

What about increasing teaching loads when the "culture" has slowly drifted toward much lighter loads? Over twenty years ago I began as an assistant professor. At that time twelve hours was typical, and whatever research or service one was able to accomplish was above and beyond that basic teaching assignment. Moreover, there was a secretary that served a dozen or more faculty. There were no research assistants, no graders, no computers, and no financial support for travel or other such perquisites. Since that time-and I am not addressing myself to the University of Missouri-we have come into another academic culture of research and grantsmanship. Light teaching loads—perhaps three hours—abundant clerical and student assistance, and a striving among many faculty for a long list of publications.

There have been indications of a return to greater emphasis on the teaching role in universities and colleges, perhaps in some disenchantment with the costs and other results of grantsmanship and research. This, I emphasize, is a tendency which will, if it is real, take time and bring considerable resistance. It may be hastened, however, by the pressures of our external environment—less federal and other soft monies, the concern of our citizenry, and reactions

of fund providing legislatures and alumni—coinciding with the individual institution's desire to shift its emphasis through the reward structure.

The Exolution of Culture

There is an important point here, not to be overlooked. The academic culture, like all others, evolves. Great teachers were highly valued twenty or more years ago. Their place in the sun has been gradually overshadowed and eventually dominated by those who could find money and produce "research." The "traditional" teaching role in many colleges and universities-and importance of undergraduate education-has edged toward finding money for reduced teaching activities, with a desire for graduate courses. At that level there was a better source of research assistance and a more convenient class hour framework. There would be a smaller number of students in courses, fewer advisees, and the opportunity, to be left uninterrupted to write proposals and do research. Thus, has developed the academic culture of the sixties, and early seventies. Do we assume that can be abruptly changed, in the face of the battle for scarce resources? Many institutions are now in the throes of trying to do just that.

Popular Stagnation

What lessons for management follow from these observations? The first has to do with our own attitudes. As we have seen, there are all kinds of "good" reasons to avoid charge. But we must be willing, when appropriate, to make the unpopular move, even though others are unwilling to rock the boat. One of the first things I learned many years ago, in my first managerial assignment, was that one cannot make everyone happy! Indeed, in many respects, the closer one is to a situation like that, the closer the organization may be to stagnation. It is pleasant to have harmony, and comfortable to stick to routines and schedules. But what happens to innovation, creativity, and progress? The effective administrator knows that change brings uncertainty, resentment, and upset. He recognizes that to be effective he sometimes has to be tough and willing to absorb the bumps and shocks in collisions of dissent. Likewise, he must be sensitive to the forces of change outside his organization.

In addition to being tough-minded, when the occasion calls for that attitude, we also must realize that we will fail on occasion. Strange as it may sound—a perfect record can be ominous, leading, as it may, to complacency. It may also be indicative of too conservative goal-setting. While goals should be attainable, an appreciable degree of stretch should be required. Once in a while we find we may have expected too much, but that may be better than low-level aspirations. Often there is more progress than if the objectives had been within easy reach.

Vice President in Charge of Revolution

Furthermore, the administrator must be determined to maintain a certain degree of tension in the organization—restlessness and flexibility become a way of life. While I would not go quite as far as Murray Lincoln, an executive of a cooperative, his thoughts in this regard are interesting:

Any organization, once it becomes successful, is apt to lose its original drive and vision. Despite their idealism, or perhaps on account of it, cooperatives are no less vulnerable to this kind of erosion. Because this is so, I've often suggested that we have a vice president in charge of revolution. He'd be one man not responsible for any operations. He'd stand to one side, with whatever staff he needed, to pick holes in whatever we were doing and remind us of our basic philosophy, our fundamental concepts. His job would be to stir up everything and everybody, to criticize and challenge everything being done—objectives, methods, programs, results. He'd keep us so discontented with the status quo there'd never be any doubt of our desire to seek new ways to meet people's needs. He'd keep us on the right track.

People change whether institutions change or not, and institutions that forget this fare left behind. Executives get into ruts... I would want my vice president in charge of revolution to spend time throwing us off balance, shaking us out of our coziness, making us feel a little insecure and uncertain.

Finally, the manager realizes that the needs of the organization, as a whole, often do conflict with the needs of the individuals within it. As harsh as it may seem, he must put the organization first, distinctly out in front of friendships, sentiment, and other personal considerations. While a firm attitude is necessary, it does not mean one is oblivious to the feelings or needs of others. Rather, by understanding why people prefer the status quo, one can take positive steps to overcome resistance to change. The manager first makes an effort to see things from the point of view of those who are affected. He tries to determine their perceptions of the situation, and how the proposed change may affect their basic needs. With proper handling by and assurances from management, the employee may see that the change will benefit rather than harm. The administrator avoids trivial changes. He is certain that the need for change stems from the facts of a situation rather than from executive whim. Necessary changes stand a much better chance of acceptance than those perceived as "change simply for the sake of change." The manager is careful to

⁷Murray D. Lincoln, Vice President in Charge, of Revolution, (New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1960), pp. 296-297

keep disturbances to existing customs to a minimum. He realizes that culture runs deep, and that in such matters where cultural conflict is involved, evolution rather than revolution is the proper course of action.

Communication also deserves top priority in any program for change. Included in the content of the communication should be the reasons requiring the change, its nature, its impact on people, and its planned timing. (Of course, we realize that some plans for change cannot be aired in advance, that they must be treated in confidence for many reasons. That situation calls for a different strategy.) At the same time, we understand that participation in the planning and implementing of change has its therapeutic effects. Often, information alone will not dispel fear. Through participation, when and if possible, anxiety can be reduced, understanding fostered, and because the employee has shared in the deliberations, a sense of proprietorship is developed in the idea. The administrator also recognizes the value of negotiation. Acceptance of change is often brought about by exchanging values and bargaining.

Lastly, we know that change frequently brings emotional pressure which must find an avenue for release. To say the least, that avenue is not one of meeting hostility with hostility, or emotion with logic. Often a mere willingness to listen as the person talks out his fears is enough to release much of the tension.

Toward a Moving Equilibrium

A few words in recapitulation and conclusion are appropriate, having reviewed the basic reasons for resistance to change and suggested a few techniques for reducing resistance. There are ever-present forces pushing for change, and as managers we must apply our wisdom to separate the good ideas from the bad ones. We know that even the new good ideas stimulate uncertainty and probabilites for confusion, conflict, and resistance. As administrators we must combine tough-mindedness with understanding to achieve that goal of a moving equilibrium. Introducing healthy tension into the organization is conducive to progress. An organization can become accustomed to tension. Tension and progress thus develop into a way of life, a tradition, and an organization sub-culture. When that has been achieved we are displaying one of the important characteristics of successful administration.

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